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HEAVENLY RECOGNITION

BY

T. DeWitt Talmage

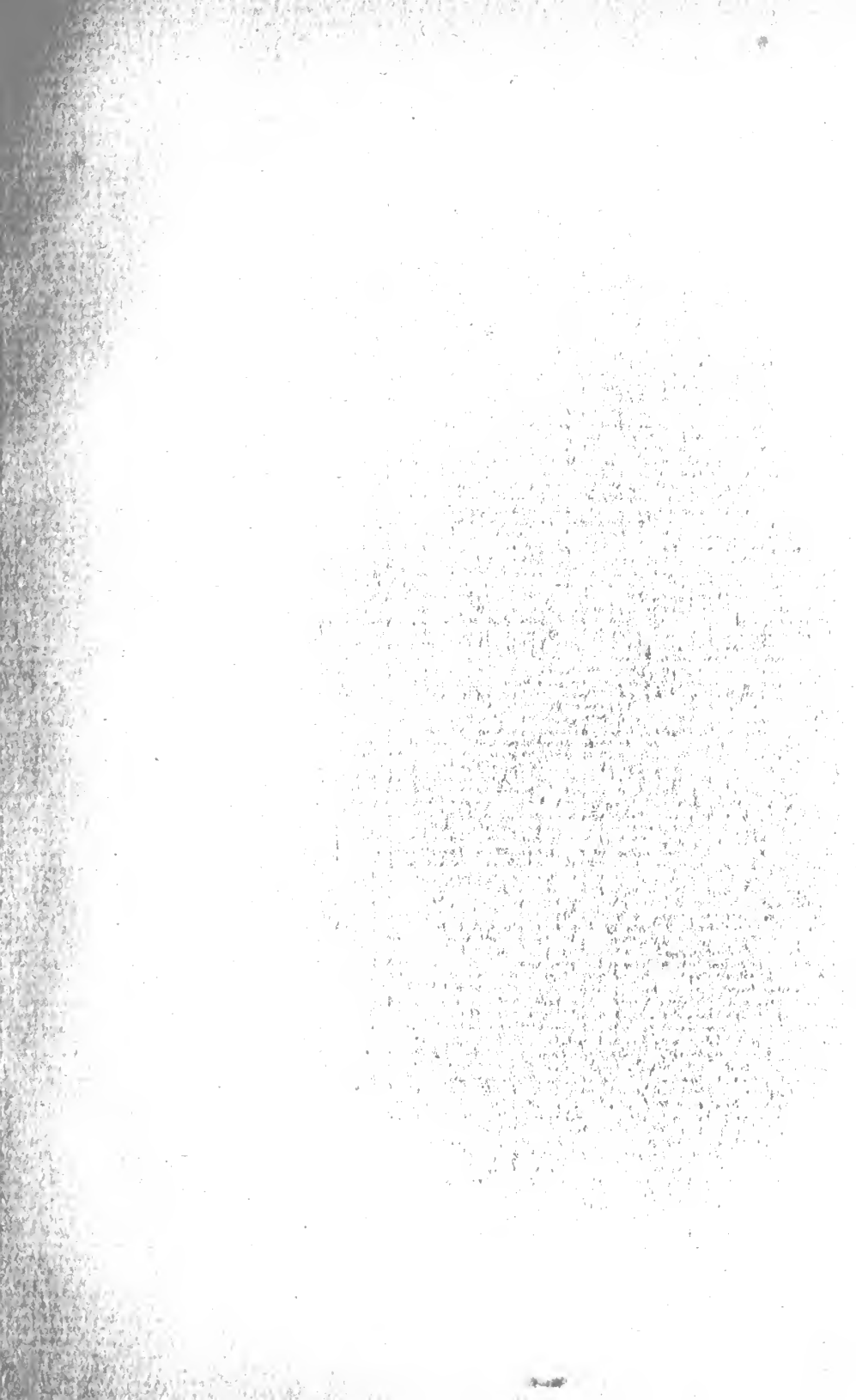
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BY

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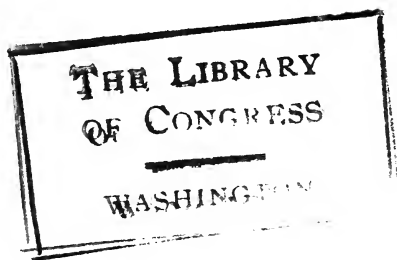
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HEAVENLY RECOGNITION.

“I shall go to him.” — 2 SAM. xii. 23.

THERE is a very sick child in the abode of David the king. Disease, which stalks up the dark lane of the poor, and puts its smothering hand on lip and nostril of the wan and wasted, also mounts the palace stairs, and bending over the pillow, blows into the face of a young prince the frosts of pain and death. Tears are wine to the King of Terrors. Alas for David the king! He can neither sleep nor eat, and lies prostrate on his face, weeping and wailing until the palace rings with the outcry of woe.

What are courtly attendants, or victorious armies, or conquered provinces, under such circumstances? What to any parent is all splen-

did surrounding when his child is sick? Seven days have passed on. There, in that great house, two eyelids are gently closed, two little hands folded, two little feet quiet, one heart still. The servants come to bear the tidings to the king, but they cannot make up their minds to tell him, and they stand at the door whispering about the matter; and David hears them, and he looks up and says to them, "Is the child dead?"—"Yes; he is dead." David rouses himself up, washes himself, puts on new apparel, and sits down to food. What power hushed that tempest? What strength was it that lifted up that king whom grief had dethroned? Oh, it was the thought that he would come again into the possession of that darling child. No grave-digger's spade could hide him. The wintry blasts of death could not put out the bright light. There would be a forge somewhere that with silver hammer would weld the broken links. In a city where the hoofs of the pale horse never strike the

pavement, he would clasp his lost treasure. He wipes away the tears from his eyes, and he clears the choking grief from his throat, and exclaims, "I shall go to him."

Was David right, or wrong? If we part on earth, shall we meet again in the next world? "Well," says some one, "that seems to be an impossibility. Heaven is so large a place we never could find our kindred there." Going into some city, without having appointed a time and place for meeting, you might wander around for weeks and for months, and perhaps for years, and never see each other; and heaven is vaster than all earthly cities together, and how are you going to find your departed friend in that country? It is so vast a realm. John went up on one mountain of inspiration, and he looked off upon the multitude, and he said, "Thousands of thousands." Then he came upon a greater altitude of inspiration, and looked off upon it again, and he said, "Ten thousand times ten thousand." And then he

came on a higher mount of inspiration, and looked off again, and he said, "A hundred and forty and four thousand and thousands of thousands." And he came on a still greater height of inspiration, and he looked off again, and exclaimed, "A great multitude that no man can number."

Now, I ask, how are you going to find your friends in such a throng as that? Is not this idea we have been entertaining after all a falsity? Is this doctrine of future recognition of friends in heaven a guess, a myth, a whim, or is it a granitic foundation upon which the soul pierced of all ages may build a glorious hope? Intense question! Every heart in this audience throbs right into it. There is in every soul here the tomb of at least one dead. Tremendous question! It makes the lip quiver, and the cheek flush, and the entire nature thrill. Shall we know each other there? I get letters almost every month asking me to discuss this subject. I get a letter in a bold, scholarly

hand, on gilt-edged paper, asking me to discuss this question; and I say, "Ah! that is a curious man, and he wants a curious question solved." But I get another letter. It is written with a trembling hand, and on what seems to be a torn-out leaf of a book, and there and here is the mark of a tear; and I say, "Oh, that is a broken heart, and it wants to be comforted."

The object of this sermon is to take this theory out of the region of surmise and speculation into the region of positive certainty. People say, "It would be very pleasant if that doctrine were true. I hope it may be true. Perhaps it is true. I wish it were true." But I believe that I can bring an accumulation of argument to bear upon this matter which will prove the doctrine of future recognition as plainly as that there is any heaven at all, and that the kiss of reunion at the celestial gate will be as certain as the dying kiss at the door of the sepulchre.

Now, when you are going to build a ship you must get the right kind of timber. You lay the keel, and make the framework of the very best materials, the keelson, stanchions, plank-shear, counter-timber, knees, transoms, all iron or solid oak. You may build a ship of lighter material; but when the cyclone comes on, it will go down. Now, we may have a great many beautiful theories about the future world built out of our own fancy, and they may do very well as long as we have smooth sailing in the world; but when the storms of sorrow come upon us, and the hurricane of death, we shall be swamped — we shall be foundered. We want a theory built out of God's eternal word. The doctrine of future recognition is not so often positively stated in the Word of God as implied; and you know, my friends, that that is, after all, the strongest mode of affirmation. Your friend travels in foreign lands. He comes home. He does not begin by arguing with you to prove that there

are such places as London and Stockholm and Paris and Dresden and Berlin, but his conversation implies it. And so this Bible does not so positively state this theory as, all up and down its chapters, take it for granted.

What does my text imply? "I shall go to him." What consolation would it be to David to go to his child if he would not know him? Would David have been allowed to record this anticipation for the inspection of all ages if it were a groundless anticipation? We read in the first book of the Bible, Abraham died and was gathered to his people. Jacob died and was gathered to his people. Moses died and was gathered to his people. What people? Why, their friends, their comrades, their old companions. Of course it means that. It cannot mean anything else. So in the very beginning of the Bible four times that is taken for granted. The whole New Testament is an arbor over which this doctrine creeps like a luxuriant vine full of the purple clusters of

consolation. James, John, and Peter followed Christ into the mountain. A light falls from heaven on that mountain, and lifts it into the glories of the celestial. Christ's garments glow, and his face shines like the sun. The door of heaven swings open. Two spirits come down and alight on that mountain. The disciples look at them, and recognize them as Moses and Elias. Now, if those disciples standing on the earth could recognize these two spirits who had been for years in heaven, do you tell me that we, with our heavenly eyesight, will not be able to recognize those who have gone out from among us only five, ten, twenty, thirty years ago?

The Bible indicates over and over again that the angels know each other; and then the Bible says that we are to be higher than the angels; and if the angels have the power of recognition, shall not we, who are to be higher than they in the next realm, have as good eyesight and as good capacity? What

did Christ mean, in his conversation with Mary and Martha, when he said, "Thy brother shall rise again?" It was as much as to say, "Don't cry. Don't wear yourselves out with this trouble. You will see him again. Thy brother shall rise again."

The Bible describes heaven as a great home circle. Well, now, that would be a very queer home circle where the members did not know each other. The Bible describes death as a sleep. If we know each other before we go to sleep, shall we not know each other after we wake up? Oh, yes! We shall know each other a great deal better than now; "for now," says the apostle, "we see through a glass darkly, but then face to face." It will be my purified, enthroned, and glorified body gazing on your purified, enthroned, and glorified body.

Now, I demand, if you believe the Bible, that you take this theory of future recognition out of the realm of speculation and surmise into

the region of positive certainty, and no more keep saying, "I hope it is so; I have an idea it is so; I guess it is so." Be able to say, with all the concentrated energy of body, mind, and soul, "I know it is so!"

There are, in addition to these Bible arguments, other reasons why I accept this theory. In the first place, because the rejection of it implies the entire obliteration of our memory. Can it be possible that we shall forget forever those with whose walk, look, manner, we have been so long familiar? Will death come, and with a sharp, keen blade hew away this faculty of memory? Abraham said to Dives, "Son, remember." If the exiled and the lost remember, will not the enthroned remember?

You know very well that our joy in any circumstance is augmented by the companionship of our friends. We cannot see a picture with less than four eyes, or hear a song with less than four ears. We want some one beside us with whom to exchange glances and sym-

pathies ; and I suppose the joy of heaven is to be augmented by the fact that we are to have our friends with us when there rise before us the thrones of the blessed, and when there surges up in our ear the *jubilate* of the saved. Heaven is not a contraction ; it is an expansion. If I know you here, I shall know you better there. Here I see you with only two eyes, but there the soul shall have a million eyes. It will be immortality gazing on immortality ; ransomed spirit in colloquy with ransomed spirit ; victor beside victor. When John Evans, the Scotch minister, was seated in his study, his wife came in and said to him, “ My dear, do you think we shall know each other in heaven ? ” He turned to her and said, “ My dear, do you think we shall be bigger fools in heaven than we are here ? ”

Again, I accept this doctrine of future recognition because the world’s expectancy affirms it. In all lands and ages this theory is received. What form of religion planted it ?

No form of religion, for it is received under all forms of religion. Then, I argue, a sentiment, a feeling, an anticipation, universally planted, must have been God-implanted; and if God-implanted, it is rightfully implanted. Socrates writes, "Who would not part with a great deal to purchase a meeting with Orpheus and Homer? If it be true that this is to be the consequence of death, I could even be able to die often."

Among the Danes, when a master dies his servant sometimes slays himself that he may serve the master in the future world. Cicero, living before Christ's coming, said, "Oh, glorious day, when I shall retire from this low and sordid scene to associate with the divine assemblage of departed spirits, and not only with the one I have just mentioned, but with my dear Cato, the best of sons, and most faithful of men! If I seemed to bear his death with fortitude, it was by no means that I did not most sensibly feel the loss I had

sustained. It was because I was supported by the consoling reflection that we could not long be separated."

The Norwegian believes it. The Indian believes it. The Greenlander believes it. The Swiss believe it. The Turks believe it. Under every sky, by every river, in every zone, the theory is adopted; and so, I say, a principle universally implanted must be God-implanted, and hence a right belief. The argument is irresistible.

Again, I adopt this theory because there are features of moral temperament and features of the soul that will distinguish us forever. How do we know each other in this world? Is it merely by the color of the eye, or the length of the hair, or the facial proportions? Oh, no! It is by the disposition as well, by natural affinity, using the word in the very best sense and not in the bad sense; and if in the dust our body should perish, and lie there forever, and there should

be no resurrection, still the soul has enough features and the disposition has enough features to make us distinguishable. I can understand how in sickness a man will become so delirious that he will not know his own friends; but shall we be blasted with such insufferable idiocy that, standing beside our best friends for all eternity, we shall never guess who they are?

Again, I think that one reason why we ought to accept this doctrine is because we never in this world have an opportunity to give thanks to those to whom we are spiritually indebted. The joy of heaven, we are told, is to be inaugurated by a review of life's work. These Christian men and women who have been toiling for Christ, have they seen the full result of their work? Oh, no!

In the church at Somerville, N. J., John Vredenburgh preached for very many years. He felt that his ministry was a failure, although he was a faithful minister preach-

ing the gospel all the time. He died, and died amid discouragements, and went home to God; for no one ever doubted that John Vredenburg was a good Christian minister. A little while after his death, there came a great awakening in Somerville; and one Sabbath two hundred souls stood up at the Christian altar espousing the cause of Christ, among them my own father and mother. And what was peculiar in regard to nearly all of those two hundred souls was that they dated their religious impressions from the ministry of John Vredenburg. Will that good Christian man before the throne of God never meet those souls brought to Christ through his instrumentality? Oh, of course he will know them! I remember one sabbath afternoon, borne down with the sense of my sins, and knowing not God, I took up Doddridge's "Rise and Progress." Oh, what a dark afternoon it was! and I read the chapters, and I read the prayers, and I tried

to make the prayers my own. Oh! I must see Philip Doddridge. A glorious old book he wrote! It is out of fashion now.

There is a mother before the throne of God. You say her joy is full. Is it? You say there can be no augmentation of it. Cannot there be? Her son was a wanderer and a vagabond on the earth when that good mother died. He broke her old heart. She died leaving him in the wilderness of sin. She is before the throne of God now. Years pass, and that son repents of his crimes, and gives his heart to God, and becomes a useful Christian, and dies, and enters the gates of heaven. You tell me that that mother's joy cannot be augmented. Let them confront each other, the son and the mother. "Oh!" she says to the angels of God, "rejoice with me! The dead is alive again, and the lost is found. Hallelujah! I never expected to see this lost one come back."

I see a soul entering heaven at last, with

covered face at the idea that it has done so little for Christ, and feeling borne down with unworthiness ; and it says to itself, "I have no right to be here." A voice from a throne says, "Oh, you forget that Sunday-school class you invited to Christ! I was one of them." And another voice says, "You forget that poor man to whom you gave a loaf of bread, and told of the heavenly bread. I was that man." And another says, "You forget that sick one to whom you gave medicine for the body and the soul. I was that one." And then Christ, from a throne overtopping all the rest, will say, "Inasmuch as ye did it to one of the least of these, ye did it to me." And then the seraphs will take their harps from the side of the throne, and cry, "What song shall it be?" And Christ, bending over the harpers, shall say, "It shall be the Harvest Home!"

One more reason why I am disposed to accept this doctrine of future recognition is that so many in their last hour on earth have con-

firmed this theory. I speak not of persons who have been delirious in their last moment, and knew not what they were about, but of persons who died in calmness and placidity, and who were not naturally superstitious. Often the glories of heaven have struck the dying pillow, and the departing man has said he saw and heard those who had gone away from him. How often it is in the dying moments parents see their departed children, and children see their departed parents. I came down to the banks of the Mohawk River. It was evening, and I wanted to go over the river, and so I waved my hat and shouted; and after awhile I saw some one waving on the opposite bank, and I heard him shout, and the boat came across, and I got in and was transported. And so I suppose it will be in the evening of our life. We shall come down to the river of death, and give a signal to our friends on the other shore; and they will give a signal back to us, and the boat comes, and our departed

kindred are the oarsmen, the fires of the setting day tingeing the tops of the paddles.

Oh! have you never sat by such a death-bed? In that hour you hear the departing soul cry, "Hark! look!" You harkened, and you looked. A little child, pining away because of the death of its mother, getting weaker and weaker every day, was taken into the room where hung the picture of her mother. She seemed to enjoy looking at it; and then she was taken away, and after awhile died. In the last moment that wan and wasted little one lifted her hands, while her face lighted up with the glory of the next world, and cried out, "Mother!" Do you tell me she did not see her mother? She did. So in my first settlement at Belleville a plain man said to me, "What do you think I heard last night? I was in the room where one of my neighbors was dying. He was a good man, and he said he heard the angels of God singing before the throne. I haven't much poetry about me; but

I listened, and I heard them too." Said I, "I have no doubt of it." Why, we are to be taken up to heaven at last by ministering spirits. Who are they to be? Souls that went up from Madras, or Antioch, or Jerusalem? Oh, no! our glorified kindred are going to troop around us.

Heaven is not a stately, formal place, as I sometimes hear it described, a very frigidity of splendor, where people stand on cold formalities, and go around about with heavy crowns of gold on their heads. No, that is not my idea of heaven. My idea of heaven is more like this: You are seated in the evening-tide by the fireplace, your whole family there, or nearly all of them there. While you are seated talking and enjoying the evening hour, there is a knock at the door; and the door opens, and there comes in a brother that has been long absent. He has been absent, for years you have not seen him; and no sooner do you make up your mind that it is certainly he, than you

leap up, and the question is, who shall give him the first embrace. That is my idea of heaven, — a great home circle where they are waiting for us. Oh! will you not know your mother's voice there? She who always called you by your first name long after others had given you the formal "Mister"? You were never anything but James, or John, or George, or Thomas, or Mary, or Florence, to her. Will you not know your child's voice? She of the bright eye, and the ruddy cheek, and the quick step, who came in from play and flung herself into your lap a very shower of mirth and beauty? Why, the picture is graven in your soul. It cannot wear out. If that little one should stand on the other side of some heavenly hill and call to you, you would hear her voice above the burst of heaven's great orchestra. Know it! You could not help but know it.

O heaven! sweet heaven! You do not spell heaven as you used to spell it, — h-e-a-v-e-n,

heaven. But now when you want to spell that word you place side by side the faces of the loved ones who are gone; and in that irradiation of light, and love, and beauty, and joy, you spell it out as never before in songs and hallelujahs. Oh, ye whose hearts are down under the sod of the cemetery, cheer up at the thought of this reunion! Oh, how much you will have to tell them when once you meet them!

How much you have been through since you saw them last! On the shining shore you will talk it all over. The heartaches, the loneliness, the sleepless nights. The weeping until you had no more power to weep, because the heart was withered and dried up. Story of vacant chair and empty cradle, and little shoe only half worn out, never to be worn again, just the shape of the foot that once pressed it. And dreams when you thought that the departed had come back again, and the room seemed bright with their faces, and you started

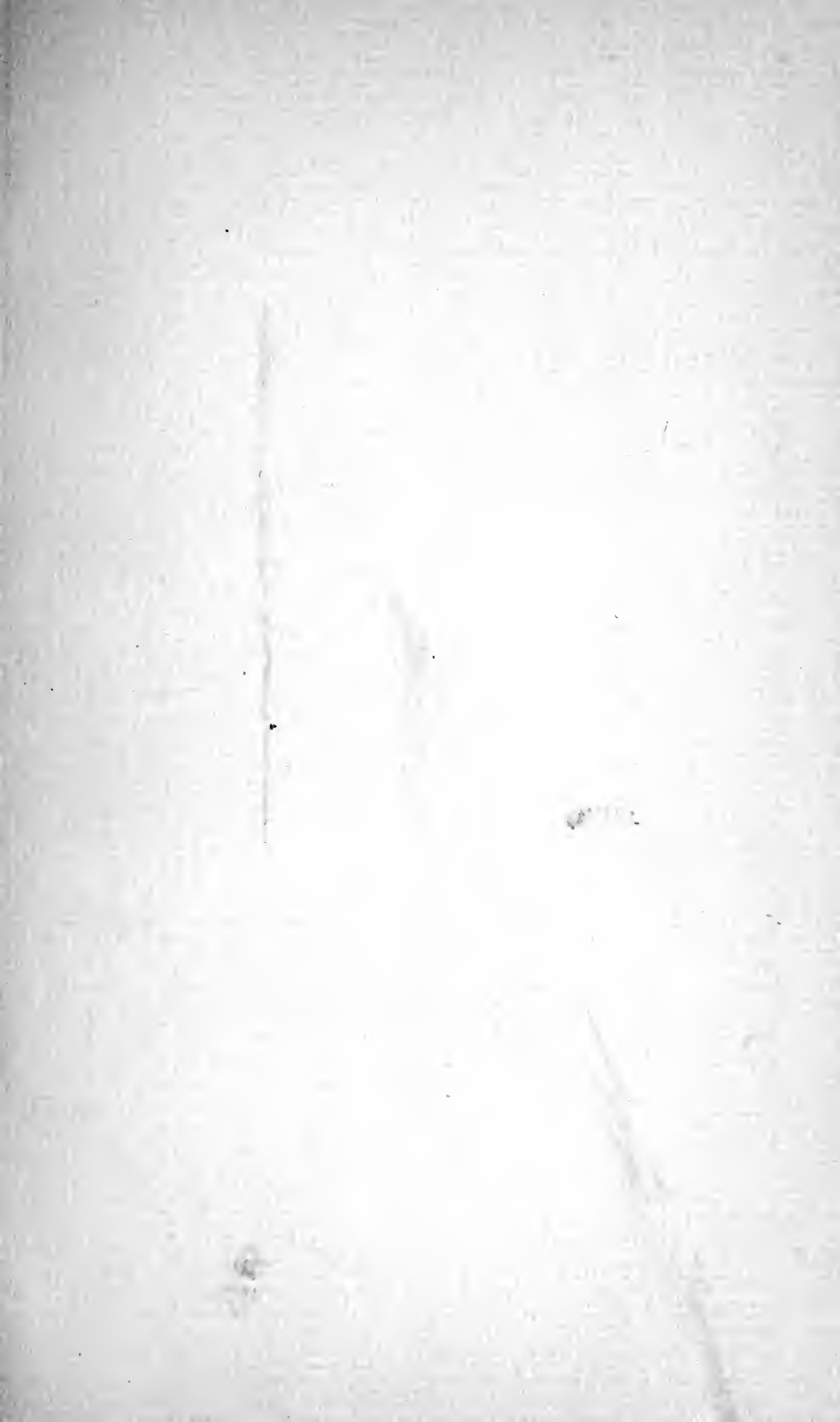
up to greet them; and in the effort the dream broke, and you found yourself standing amid-room in the midnight—alone. Talking it all over, and then, hand in hand, walking up and down in the light. No sorrow, no tears, no death. O heaven! beautiful heaven! Heaven where our friends are. Heaven where we expect to be.

Oh, how they bound in these spirits before the throne! Some shout with gladness. Some break forth into uncontrollable weeping for joy. Some stand speechless in their shock of delight. They sing. They quiver with excessive gladness. They gaze on the temples, on the palaces, on the waters, on each other. They weave their joy into garlands, they spring it into triumphal arches, they strike on timbrels; and then all the loved ones gather in a great circle around the throne of God, —fathers, mothers, brothers, sisters, sons and daughters, lovers and friends, hand to hand around about the throne,—the circle, hand to

hand, joy to joy, jubilee to jubilee, victory to victory, "till the day break, and the shadows flee away. Turn, my beloved, and be like a roe or a young hart upon the mountains of Bether."

Oh, how different it is on earth from the way it is in heaven when a Christian dies! We say, "Close his eyes." In heaven they say, "Give him a palm." On earth we say, "Let him down in the ground." In heaven they say, "Hoist him on a throne." On earth it is, "Farewell, farewell." In heaven it is, "Welcome, welcome." And so I see a Christian soul coming down to the river of death, and he steps into the river, and the water comes up to his ankle. He says, "Lord Jesus, is this death?" "No," says Christ; "this is not death." And he wades still deeper down into the waters until the flood comes to the knee; and he says, "Lord Jesus, tell me, tell me, is this death?" And Christ says, "No, no; this is not death." And he wades still

farther down until the wave comes to the girdle; and the soul says, "Lord Jesus, is this death?" "No," says Christ; "this is not." And deeper in wades the soul till the billow strikes the lip, and the departing one cries, "Lord Jesus, is this death?" "No," says Christ; "this is not." But when Christ had lifted this soul on a throne of glory, and all the pomp and joy of heaven came surging to its feet, then Christ said, "This, oh transported soul! this is death!"



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